



## **Theme 6: Cuisine**

### **Report of Greece**

*Cultural & Social Digital documentation Laboratory*

*UNIVERSITY OF THE AEGEAN*

*Lofos Panepistimiou 81100 Mytilini*

**by Eleni Liva, Flora Tzelepoglou, Dr. Sotiris Chtouris**

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## 1. SHEEP BREEDING IN GREECE

- **History and Mythology of Sheep Breeding**
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In ancient times sheep and shepherds were inextricably tied to the mythology and legends of the time. According to ancient Greek mythology Amaltheia was the she-goat nurse of the god Zeus who nourished him with her milk in a cave on Mount Ida in Crete. When the god reached maturity he created his thunder-shield (*aigis*) from her hide and the 'horn of plenty' (*keras amaltheias* or *cornucopia*) from her horn. Sheep breeding played an important role in ancient Greek economy as Homer and Hesiod testify in their writings. Indeed, during the Homeric age, meat was a staple food: lambs, goats, calves, giblets were charcoal grilled. In several Rhapsodies of Homer's *Odyssey*, referring to events that took place circa 1180 BC, there is mention of roasting lamb on the spit.

During the Byzantine era, sheep farming became widespread in the whole expanse of the Byzantine Empire, in contrast to Central European regions which turned more to other livestock. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries sheep flocks move freely throughout the Ottoman Empire territory, as in the past; however, this becomes more and more difficult in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the establishment of national borders. During the 1920s Greece goes through significant geopolitical changes and, as a result, sheep farming is transformed as well. An important influx of Greek refugee population, originating from Eastern Thrace and Asia Minor, many of whom were farmers and livestock farmers, leads to a decrease in available pasture land, as it was now given to crop farming, a turn from extensive to intensive farming. During the 1940s and '50s a large number of sheep farmers move from mountainous areas to the lowlands and in the '60s sheep cross breeding becomes extensive. After the 1960s there is an effort to improve domestic breeds more systematically and to restructure sheep farming, however, contrary to other countries that aim to improve animal stock by selectively improving pure breeds, in Greece a policy of extensive crossbreeding is applied, leading to the demise and extinction of some rare indigenous breeds. Some of the most suitable breeds for landscape management of extensive areas or specific locations, which are promoted by the Greek Government, are: Sarakatsani, Drama native breed, Florina, Karagouniko, Skopelos (or Glossa), Levkimmi, Sfakia, Psiloris, Sitia, Chalkidiki, Chios or Sakiz, Argos. Their preservation is of paramount importance, not only for environmental reasons, namely preservation of the indigenous fauna, but also because they are fully adapted to the dry climate and, generally, the environmental fragility of the islands.

Today, sheep and goat-raising is one of the most active economic sectors in Greece, contributing around 18% of total agricultural income and representing more than half of the country's animal production. Being the fifth country in the EU in sheep and goat production, about 45% of the total number of goats is raised in Greece. One differentiating element from the rest of the European countries is the fact that in Greece sheep and goats are raised for milk production rather than meat, leather or wool. In recent years there is a tendency for organized sheep and goat farming units.

## 2. SHEEP BASED GREEK CUISINE: HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND

The issues of food, cuisine and diet are highly evocative of a people's identity. Food being an everyday practice that repeatedly produces its own specific patterns, it defines not only individuals (personal identity, memories, family, social class), but also societies and cultures (national cuisine, local products, culinary customs, food rituals). Greek gastronomy has a rich and old history as it developed through the ages, influenced by historic events, geographical constraints, seasonal changes, culinary traditions and religious norms imposed by the Greek Orthodox church (periods of fasting). Greek landscape is extremely diverse and Greek regions present a wealth of special characteristics that distinguish them; it is only natural that local cuisines developed a rich repertoire of dishes and recipes.

Almost every region in Greece had and continues to have a sheep rearing tradition. For example, the traditional festive Greek Orthodox Easter table, which is the most important annual event throughout the Greek territory, figures lamb or goat as its undisputed protagonist, in spite of the fact that culinary local traditions may differ from one region to the other; for instance, mainland Greece favours sheep, while insular regions, mainly in the Aegean Sea, favour goat.

Let us now see the main geographical departments we can distinguish in Greece, in relation to sheep and goat breeding and consumption.

### **Macedonia – Thrace**

These are regions with high mountains, big plains, long rivers and big lakes at the crossroads between East and West. Nomadic people, like the Sarakatsani and the Vlachs, being exclusively nomadic shepherds till the '60s, contributed significantly in establishing a thriving dairy and meat production in these regions. Furthermore, in 1922, following the Lausanne Treaty, 1.000.000 Greek refugees forcefully abandoned their Asia Minor and Black Sea communities and established themselves all over the Greek territory, Macedonia and Thrace being two of the most important reception regions. This massive influx greatly influenced Greek cuisine, as the refugees brought with them their culinary customs and traditions, spicy dishes with an oriental flavour.

Today, the most popular ways of cooking lamb is casserole (with tomato or fricassée sauce), roast in the oven with yogurt sauce, spit roast, or stuffed with offal, bread and aromatic herbs and spices.

The most typical dish of the region, however, is the *sarma*, composed of grape or cabbage leaves rolled around a filling usually based on minced meat. It is found in the cuisines of the former Ottoman Empire, from the Middle East to the Balkans and Central Europe. *Sarma* means 'a wrapped thing' in Turkish. *Dolma*, which properly refers to stuffed vegetables, is often conflated with *sarma*. Minced meat (usually lamb, goat and veal), rice, onions, and various spices, including salt, pepper and various local herbs are mixed together and then rolled into large plant leaves - cabbage or vine leaves. The combination is then boiled for several hours. While specific recipes vary across the region, it is uniformly recognized that the best cooking method is slow boiling in large clay pots. An interesting variation is *tziyerosarmas* (*ciger* in Turkish is the liver) whose wrapping is not a plant leaf but the lamb's stomach membrane. It is also stuffed with lamb's liver, rice and aromatic herbs.

Another dish is *patsas*, which used to be very popular in Macedonia and Thrace. The first *patsas* restaurant (*patsatzidiko*) opened in Thessaloniki, in the '20s, by a Greek refugee from Istanbul. The following years they gained in popularity but nowadays only few remain in business. *Patsas* is a soup composed of the stomach, offal and legs of the animal (mainly lamb or veal). A good quality *patsas* is white coloured, seasoned with salt and pepper, red chili pepper and pickled garlic (*skordostoumbi*).

### **Epirus**

The rugged terrain of Epirus has been the privileged living space for nomadic and semi-nomadic livestock farmers, roaming the Pindos mountain range with their herds. During the Ottoman Empire the absence of national borders in a vast geographical region facilitated herd movement from the mountain range to the Thessaly and Macedonian plains. Two local sheep breeds, '*boutsiko*' and '*vlach*', highly resistant to cold and constant movement, as well as goats of the Greek breed '*common goat*', were mostly used by shepherds to produce high quality dairy products (i.e. the PDO cheese *batzo*) and excellent meat.

As far as the Epirus culinary tradition is concerned, one could say that it has always been a bridge between East and West, North and South, in the sense that it uses olive oil and butter, or a mix of these two when appropriate, this combination reflecting characteristics of its local economy and culture. This is the reason why in Epirus the *pita* (pie) is not only a staple food but also a cultural icon. It is a logical consequence of the fact that transhumant shepherds moved extensively all over the Epirus Mountains and lowland pastures, exchanging their products with wheat, corn, flour and salt. With these simple ingredients and a pan on coals, covered by the all-purpose '*gastra*, namely a metallic lid that converts a simple pan to an improvised oven, they cooked not only pies, but also made bread. Cooking was slow and thorough in this contraption and, as a result, gave delicious dishes. In Epirus everything can be converted to a pie, meat, fish, vegetables, even the "*vasilopita*", New Year's pie, is made with lamb meat!

### **The Ionian Islands**

The Ionian Islands' traditional cuisine was formed under the influence of immigrants settling there from different regions of Greece (Epirus, Crete, Peloponnesus), as well as foreign invaders, such as the Venetians, the French and the English. However, the Venetian rule period was the most influential in forming the islands' gastronomy, either with new recipes or with the introduction of new cooking ware. Because of the fact that the Ionian Islands were never conquered by the Ottomans, as was the case with mainland Greece, most of the Aegean Islands and Crete, their gastronomy tends to resemble with other islands that were also under Genovese or Venetian occupation (namely the Cyclades). During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, foreign travelers mention the fact that Corfu imports almost all its meat from neighbouring Epirus and Albania. Animal breeding was practiced in the past but today is very limited.

Indeed, the Epirotic influence is evident in various dishes such as roast lamb with yogurt sauce. Otherwise, a most common dish is roast lamb/kid goat, as well as lamb casserole with tomato sauce or vegetables. Most characteristically, in Corfu there is no traditional "*magiritsa*" soup on Holy Saturday, namely the first meal breaking the fast of the 40 days Greek Orthodox Lent period, but a dish called "*tsilikothra*", which is lamb liver seasoned with aromatic herbs and spices in a casserole thickened with an egg and lemon sauce (*avgolemono*).

## **Thessaly**

This Greek region is a real mosaic of people, customs and traditions, depending on the relief of each area. To give an example, on Thessaly's mountains we have Vlachs, Sarakatsani, Chasiotes and Antichasiotes, who are mainly livestock farmers and shepherds, while the Karagouni people live in the plains; along the Aegean coast inhabitants have adopted insular habits and customs. Each one of these population groups preserves each own cultural and gastronomy identity, which is passed from one generation to the other. Farming and animal breeding always provided local raw material that eventually shaped the region's identity. Farmers involved in livestock breeding supplied the region with meat - that would usually be consumed only on Sundays or festive days, as it was considered a rare delicacy. They mainly produced milk and dairy products that assured their everyday diet. Farmers living in the plains and valleys produced all kinds of vegetables, fruits and cereals that would be exchanged with meat, milk, cheese and yogurt at the open air markets where these two groups traded their produce. This is why a lot of traditional lamb dishes are garnished with yogurt, cheese and a variety of vegetables. As an example we can mention the *Wine Grower's Lamb* recipe, according to which the lamb is wrapped in vine leaves and is stuffed with *kefalotyri* cheese; a variation to this recipe has the lamb stuffed with *batzo* cheese wrapped in wax paper. A Sarakatsani recipe from the Agrafa Mountains is roast lamb with yogurt poured on top.

In Thessaly and Macedonia there is a culinary tradition of cooking lamb offal. The '*magiritsa*' is a traditional dish associated with the Easter (Pascha) tradition of the Greek Orthodox Church, cooked on Holy Saturday, breaking the fast following the 40 days fasting during the Greek Orthodox Lent. '*Magiritsa*' is a special soup made from lamb offal (liver, heart and intestine), as well as lettuce, dill, spring onions and rice. On Easter Sunday, while the lamb is roasting in the spit, people enjoy eating the '*kokoretsi*', namely lamb offal finely chopped and stuffed in the animal's intestines (**Recipe 2**) grilled on charcoals. Another traditional dish prepared mainly in the mountain villages of Thessaly, is the '*lianomata*'. When there was a celebration and the lamb or goat kid was slaughtered, they would prepare the animal's offal as a delicacy, frying the liver, heart and stomach with tomato sauce.

'*Splinandero*' is also very popular; it is a dish prepared with lamb's intestines stuffed with the animal's finely chopped spleen, heart and liver grilled or baked in the oven. Another one is the lamb '*bolia*', that is caul fat wrapped around the animal's offal with vegetables, in tomato sauce.

*Garthoumba* is also a popular delicacy based on lamb offal with coarsely chopped liver and lights, as well as lungs, kidneys and heart, wrapped with lamb intestine in the form of a woven braid.

## **Sterea Hellas or Roumeli**

Sterea Hellas, also known as Roumeli, is a geographical department in central mainland Greece. It is a mainly rural region, characterized by high mountains and great plains. Its economy is based on farming and animal breeding, as well as forestry. The extensive hilly and mountainous terrain contributes significantly to the development of livestock farming, both small and large animals.

On the mountains of Sterea Hellas there is seasonal pastoralism, in summer, while during wintertime pastoralists move their flocks to the plains. However, this kind of livestock farming loses gradually its nomadic character, becoming increasingly semi nomadic. Around the area of Athens there are significant sheep farms.

During the Ottoman occupation this mountainous region was the natural refuge for persecuted Greeks from surrounding areas, as well as the base for *kleftes* and *armatoli*<sup>1</sup>. During this period these guerilla fighters, whenever they established a truce among them, used to spit roast lambs, because they believed that in this way they honoured Jesus Christ (the '*Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*') who would bless them with "resurrection" from the misery of their enslaved life. The Easter **spit lamb (Recipe 1)** was first established as an Easter custom in Roumeli and gradually was adopted by all Greeks after the national liberation. Spit roasting a lamb on Easter Sunday in the open air is one of the oldest and most revered customs of Greek people. Another old (since the Ottoman occupation) and very special way of roasting a lamb was the *Kleftiko* (similar to the Peloponnese recipe). Preparing the *Kleftiko* lamb is a quite time consuming process: First we open a big pit in the ground big enough so that the lamb can fit in easily; then we burn wood till it becomes charcoal. After thorough burning we remove coals and put the **lamb inside the pit** wrapped in its hide. The lamb has been seasoned with salt and pepper on the inside and has been tightly sewn. We cover the pit with ground and we put the coals on top keeping them burning continuously. Twenty four hours later we open the pit and remove the cooked lamb. Today instead of using the animal's hide we use clay pans.

### **Peloponnese or Morias**

The economy of Peloponnese was traditionally based almost exclusively on agriculture and livestock farming, sheep farming being quite developed. The Peloponnese inhabitants lived in isolation for four centuries, under the Ottoman occupation (with some cities being conquered for some time by the Venetians), an isolation that cut them off from the outside world but also from each other. A *sui generis* migration flow took place as soon as the Ottoman rule consolidated its power. Greeks living in the plains abandoned their towns, villages and communities, opting for settlement on the rugged mountains of the peninsula; they were called *Kleftes* and *Armatoli*. Indeed, because of the fact that Ottomans found it difficult to exercise effectively their military or administrative authority on mountainous areas, *Kleftes* and *Armatoli* chose to live a semi legal existence on the mountains than being completely subjugated by the rulers, fighting the enemy whenever they could. It is also worth noting that these were also the protagonists of every liberation struggle culminating to the National Liberation Revolution in 1821. This kind of mountain life was full of hardships, as well as dangers, thus influencing everyday practices. Food was adapted to the specific conditions and available resources. As an illustration of the above we can mention the culinary tradition that was developed by the guerrillas in cooking lamb with a special way, called *Kleftiko of Morias*. They would steal a sheep and then roast it **buried in the ground**, (in a similar way of lamb roasting as in Roumeli); then they would chop the lamb in pieces and place them inside the animal's belly or the lamb's hide. It is quite evident that overwhelming security reasons against the enemy imposed this culinary tradition, as it is the case with the Aegean islands whose inhabitants lived in constant fear of the pirates. Burying the lamb in the ground assured that no tell tale smoke or smell would betray their position. This basic concept developed in time, so we have several variations, namely wrapping the lamb in wax paper, filo pastry or aluminium foil and then slowly roasting in a wood-fire oven or an electric one. A slightly different variation of the above idea (buried in the ground) is the lamb *Kapama* (kapak= lid in Turkish) (**Recipe 3**), meaning that the lamb is baked inside a large earthenware casserole like

pot with a firm lid. Nowadays it is quite common to wrap the lamb in 3 fold wax paper and put it in **gastro**, i.e. a deep, round, fired clay or earthenware casserole pot.

### **The Aegean Islands**

From a geophysical point of view the Aegean is an enclosed Sea of the Mediterranean, connecting the Black Sea with the rest of the Mediterranean, at the crossroads of three continents, Asia Europe and Africa. Since prehistoric times, as well as the Bronze Age, animal sheds (Santorini), pottery jars, farming tools and weaving accessories give ample evidence of the existence of farming and animal farming communities all over its islands. Archeological excavations have revealed that animal farming was extensive, mainly sheep and goats, cattle and pigs. On the barren Cyclades islands farmers bred sheep and goats, while on larger islands there were cattle breeding (Lemnos Island).

The Aegean gastronomy and culinary tradition is not always a homogenous entity, since a lot of differences are evident all over the Aegean islands. For instance, the islands of Lesbos, Lemnos and Chios had much more affinity with Asia Minor and Istanbul, than mainland Greece; the same with the Sporades islands, having more contacts with Evia and Volos than the other Aegean islands, the island of Samothraki with Macedonia and Thrace etc. The Cyclades islands remained quite isolated, some were conquered by the Venetians others by the Ottomans.

However, in spite of individual or regional peculiarities, one could say that fish and dairy products are two staple foods shared by most of the Aegean islands' cuisine. Nowadays tourism has largely substituted agriculture on these islands, and all this cultural heritage is at risk.

#### **a) The Cyclades islands**

The Cyclades is a Greek island group in the Aegean Sea, south-east of the mainland of Greece. Ancient Greeks gave this name to this group of 24 islands because they are *around* (cycle) the sacred island of Delos. The Cyclades have a rich history, since 2500 BC, their inhabitants being a seafaring people and experienced traders.

Following Constantinople's conquest by the Crusaders in 1204, the Cyclades islands became a Venetian fortress. The island of Naxos was the administrative center of the Venetian duchy till the Ottomans conquered all the islands in 1566. These three and a half centuries of Venetian rule have left a strong mark on the islands' cultural identity, as well as their culinary traditions.

The Cyclades islands are barren, hilly and mountainous with limited farming land. Animal farming, especially sheep and goat, was highly developed, since there were no pastures for big cattle. There are big numbers of goats roaming on each island, supplying meat and milk to the local population all year through. It is only natural that some of the tastier recipes for goat kid originate from the Cyclades islands; these are simple dishes, cooked in the oven or in the pot, seasoned with the exquisite aroma of local herbs and plants.

On the Aegean islands housewives tend to cook the goat kid (not the lamb) in the oven and not on the spit. Traditionally, they **stuff** the goat kid – each island having its own stuffing, as they use local herbs and spices. A mainstream stuffing would consist of offal (liver, lungs), rice or bulgur, as well as fresh herbs, such as dill and fennel. Some recipes include lemon extract, poppy leaves or nuts and currants. In the olds



times meat consumption was very limited as it was considered a luxury; that is why only rich families could afford to have meat on Sundays, while the rest of the population would have meat only during celebrations and of course at Easter. While we know that a stereotypical picture of Greek Orthodox Easter is the lamb on the spit, which is true in mainland Greece, it is a different picture on the islands, where housewives traditionally prepare the stuffed lamb. There are a lot of variations and local denominations all over the islands. In Paros, for instance, the *patoudo* is all kinds of stuffed meat, even poultry. However, the Easter *patoudo* is lamb stuffed with cheese, currants, rice and bread crumbs. In Andros, the Easter stuffed lamb or kid goat is called *lambriatiko* (*Lambri* is also a name for Easter) and the stuffing is made with local fresh cheese, eggs, lettuce or other wild herbs, scallions, dill, spearmint and fennel. In Heraclea, the stuffing is made with bulgur, butter, cheese, rosemary and nuts. In Schinousa, with rice and aromatic herbs. In Naxos, the lamb is stuffed with liver and offal, cheese and spices; on the same island, the Easter lamb is stuffed with seasonal vegetables, such as spinach, lettuce, fennel, onions and scallions. In Sifnos, the lamb is cooked with herbs and red wine; it is called *mastelo*, a reference to the clay pot inside which it is cooked.

#### **b) The Dodecanese islands**

Each one of the Dodecanese islands (which in fact are not 12, *dodeka*, but 14), has its own unique character, its own habits and gastronomy, although they all share a common historic background. This cluster of islands is located near the Asia Minor coast, as well as North Africa, and this proximity, undoubtedly, casts its influence on local gastronomy, endowing it with spices and perfumes and original dishes.

The Dodecanese islands have a rich history of invaders and conquerors, from the Ottomans, the Venetians and the Franks till the Italians who ruled the islands till the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. Since ancient times the Dodecanese were on the vital trade routes in the Eastern Mediterranean and they had a regular communication with not only Asia Minor coast but also Egypt. During the Byzantine era they were actively engaged in the spice trade, Rhodes being the strategic stronghold of the Knights of Saint John who traded in valuable spices, bringing them to Europe. In some of the smaller islands, such as Kalymnos, Chalki and Symi fish were the staple food and local cuisine was based almost exclusively on them. Meat was always scarce in traditional Mediterranean diet and it was only at Easter that people would cook lamb or goat kid, usually stuffed, in the wood fire oven. **Stuffed lamb** is a culinary habit popular not only in the Aegean islands but also along the Asia Minor coastal communities.

The cooking utensil, traditionally, was an earth ware pan that had to be sealed tightly – sometimes using dough. It was a low, wide pan, either round or oval, with a lid and two side handles (today we use the **gastro**). Lighting the traditional wood fire clay oven was a ritual; everything had to be done carefully and when the baking pan was inside, the oven was sealed with mud and bricks so that it was airtight. The lamb remained in the oven, cooking slowly, for 20 hours.

One of the most intriguing characteristics of the Dodecanese islands is the appearance of cloves in many savory dishes. *Byzanti*, a specialty from the island of Karpathos, is one of countless stuffed Easter lamb or goat dishes made all over the Aegean (the stuffing, apart from offal, rice or bulgur and scallions, is seasoned with garlic, cumin, cinnamon, cloves, pine nuts, dill and pepper). In Astypalea, the stuffed lamb or goat kid is called *lambrianos* (Lambri=Easter). In Kalymnos, the Easter lamb is called *mououri* (**Recipe 4**) and it is baked in the homonym special earth ware pan. The stuffing consists of finely chopped liver, currants, onions, grated pine nuts,

red wine, dill, spearmint, cinnamon, cloves, rice, cumin and tomatoes. In Rhodes, the lamb stuffing, called *lambriatis*, consists of the animal's liver, bulgur, rice, onions, garlic, pine nuts, cinnamon, all spice, nutmeg, cumin, cloves, black currant, dill, fresh grated orange and bergamot. It is cooked in the *gastro* or wrapped in aluminum foil. In a similar way, in Telos, the lamb stuffing is made with chopped liver, rice, dill, tomato and cumin.

### c) The North Aegean Islands

In North Aegean islands mountains cover most of their surface, 40% of which is pasture land. Sheep breeding is quite developed, however, in Ikaria, where sheep and goats graze everywhere without any restrictions, there is a problem of over grazing and environmental degradation. Their culinary tradition has been shaped by their proximity to the Asia Minor coast, consequently stuffed lamb is very popular; in Samos and in Ikaria -, in Lesbos and Chios we have lamb stuffed with liver, pine nuts and spices, as well as with yogurt poured on the top.

### d) Sporades islands

The cuisine of the island of Skyros is based mainly on animal farming products. Lambs and goats graze freely on the island and are cooked in a unique way.

### Crete

It is said that animal farming first appeared in Crete along with the first inhabitants who settled on the island. References in Homer, as well as findings from the Minoan era certify that the oldest profession was that of the shepherd's. Animal farming in Crete mainly involves sheep and goat, as the island has the 16% and 15% of the total sheep and goat population of Greece respectively (there are more than 1.200.000 sheep and goats). Out of the total animal population, 70% is located on the mountains, 20% on hilly areas and 10% in the lowland areas. Sheep and goats are free range, grazing freely or in *metata*<sup>ii</sup> upon the Cretan flora, namely a wide range of plants and shrubs. Local breeds have become perfectly adapted to the island's micro climate and there is no need to use drugs or antibiotics.

In Crete, it is evident that the particular ecosystem shapes its culinary tradition. Indeed, Crete presents a unique botanical wealth, its aromatic plants, endemic wild herbs and shrubbery figuring promptly in its gastronomy. The Cretan cuisine has been shaped by western (Venetian) as well as oriental influence – the last instance was the massive refugee influx of Greeks from Asia Minor following the 1922 war – and its gastronomy can only be characterized as original based on excellent raw materials. As an example we can mention the *gamopilafo* (wedding *pilaf*) with *staka butter* (butterfat from goat's milk), (**Recipe 5**), snails, 'meat cake', *graviera* cheese and free range goat kid served with honey. Cretan gastronomy reflects memories of its distant past, Byzantine Venetian, Ottoman. Traditionally, in Crete they would not spit roast the Easter lamb; instead, they would roast it in various ways, i.e. *ofto* (and/or *anti-kristo*), boiled, in red sauce, in *avgolemono* (egg and lemon sauce) with artichokes etc. A soft white cheese, produced in the beginning of springtime, was always a necessary ingredient, as it accompanied meat at the celebratory Easter table. Moreover, the 'meat cake', namely a pie with cheese, boiled lamb and cinnamon seasoning, is one of the most unusual and original recipes.

Regarding roast lamb, one of the oldest ways of cooking it is called *ofto*, or, more recently named *anti-kristo* (*opposite*). Until a few years ago, one could still meet shepherds on the Psiloritis Mountain, in Crete, who would use almost exclusively this

method for roasting their lamb. In Homer's Iliad, Rhapsody I, there is a passage describing this way of roasting lamb, not on coals, but using fire. Let us see how they would proceed to make *antikristo* lamb: First, they chose a lamb - more rarely a kid goat – aged one year maximum. Then the animal is cut into four pieces, it is seasoned with salt and each part is skewered with a sharp wooden stick. In ancient times, there are reports of warriors using their spears as spit. Next, a large pit is dug in the ground with a lot of firewood to build a strong fire. The skewers are placed around the pit's perimeter, taking into consideration the intensity of the fire, the wind's direction and the distance between the meat and the fire.

### 3. PREPARATORY TECHNOLOGIES RELATED TO SHEEP MEALS – TOOLS USED TO PREPARE SHEEP MEALS

It is quite evident that culinary traditions, concerning lamb and goat, developed all over Greece, are closely linked to each region's particular history, geomorphologic conditions and local customs. In mountainous areas these traditions were influenced by the living conditions of nomadic shepherds who had access to plentiful raw materials and thus developed interesting ways of cooking lamb or goat meat. As most of the time they found themselves in the open air, they managed to cook meat in such a way that very few cooking utensils were necessary. Apart from the method of **burying the carcass in a pit with coals**, all the other methods use a wooden or metal rod (**spit**) to roast pieces of meat or the whole animal.

On the Aegean islands, where oriental influences are dominant, the lamb or goat kid is **stuffed** with aromatic herbs and spices. Wherever we have the addition of rice in the stuffing it is quite evident that there is a reference to Ottoman recipes, with Persian origins.<sup>iii</sup> The most frequently used cooking pan is the earthen ware **gastro** which is sealed tightly with clay to prevent drying out of the meat, so that all the meat juices remain inside.<sup>iv</sup>

### 4. LIFECYCLE AS WELL AS ANNUAL CELEBRATIONS CONNECTED TO SHEEP

Lamb cooked with various methods (roast in the oven, with tomato sauce, stuffed, spit roast etc) was always prominent in celebrations such as **weddings, name days, or Sunday family lunch**. The wedding soup (lamb and tomato soup) was also very common in the old times.

Of course it is during the **Greek Orthodox Easter** that the lamb is the guest of honour at the celebratory lunch, always cooked according to the local culinary tradition. It is also worth noting that lamb figures prominently in religious festivals and rituals, as, for instance, the *kourbani lamb*<sup>v</sup>.

Indeed, every village has its own patron saint and it is a custom to organize, once a year, a *kourbani* to honour him/her. The ritual starts early in the morning, when the animals are led to the sacrifice place where they are first blessed by the priest and then they are slaughtered. They are cut into pieces and they are put into big copper cauldrons to boil. While the meat is boiling rice or bulgur is added in the broth. When the celebratory Mass is over, the priest invites everybody to take part in the feast and distributes the meat. These religious festivals, apart from being an expression of faith, constitute collective cultural events that bring together people strengthening their sense of community. Through the sacrificial act, namely the sacrificial lamb, the

community reaffirms its collective identity and renews its commitment to the social and family context.

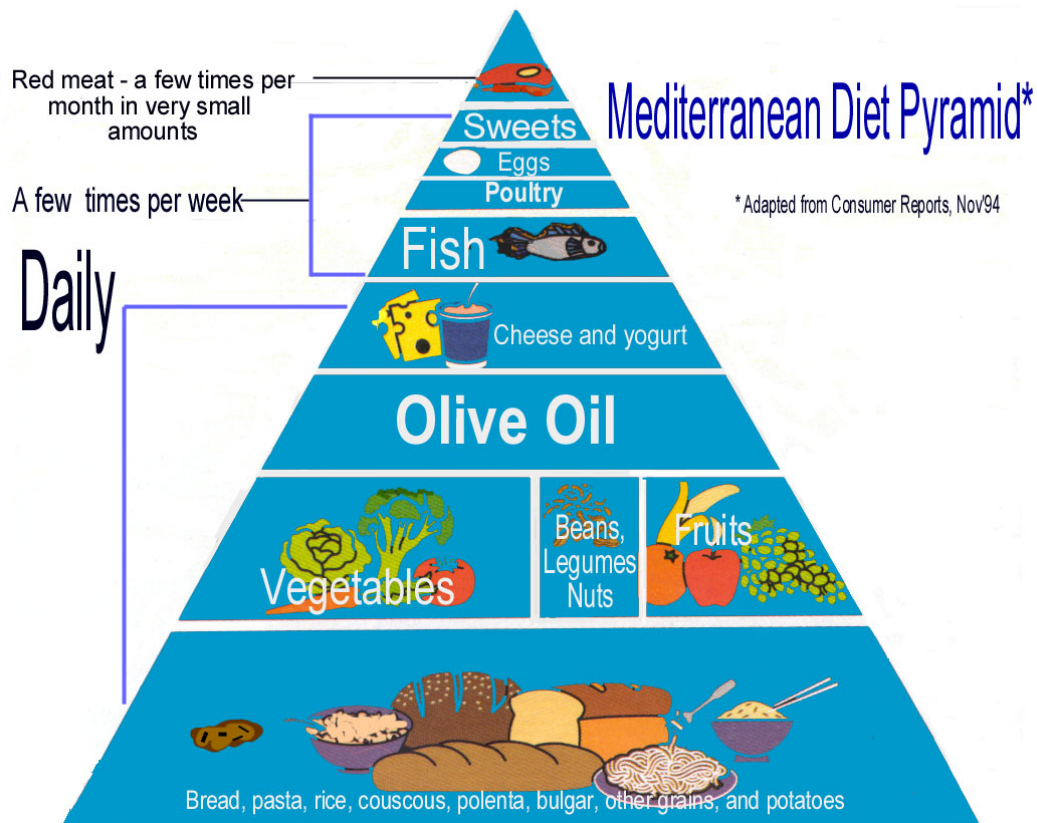
#### **4. LOCAL PRODUCTS, LOCAL BRANDS (PDO)**

It is quite natural to conclude that lambs and goats can be very well characterized as the «national animal protein» in the Greek diet. Currently, in Greece, there are 5.200.000 goats (first among EU member states) and 9.400.000 sheep. Quite recently, the EU services have granted PDO certification for goats and milk lambs of the Ellassona region (central Greece). This is the first certification of its kind granted to fresh meat products in Greece. Ellassona, in Thessaly, has developed a thriving animal farming sector, with approximately 400.000 free range sheep and goats, mainly local breeds that graze in pastures of more than 250,000 acres, rich in medicinal and aromatic plants and herbs, in a variety of altitudes.

Currently, there are several promotion campaigns of the so called “**Baskets of Farming Products**”. Indeed, in most European countries it is quite common to promote such ‘Baskets’, on behalf of various European regions, thus enhancing the development of local economy. In Greece, however, only some regions have managed to undertake such a promotion. These “Baskets” will include not only PDO products, but also a wide range of local brands. Quality and sufficient volume of local production are the main criteria in order to undertake such a promotional campaign destined for the domestic or international market. According to the bill of law to be adopted, each ‘Basket’ will include products of animal and vegetable origin, dairy products, meat etc. it has been proposed to include lamb and goat meat in the Skopelos “Basket of Farming Products”, as well as mountainous Argitheia, Samothraki, Ellassona and Epirus (along with cheese products there are efforts to standardize the “Epirotic breakfast” in hotels).

#### **INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE: The Mediterranean diet**

**Mediterranean diet** is a term coined by the American physiologist Ancel Keys who extolled the virtues of following a diet rich in vegetables, fruits, legumes, unrefined cereals, olive oil, dairy products and occasionally fish and meat, as it limited the risks for cardiovascular disease. In 1993, at the *‘International Conference for the Mediterranean Diet’*, there was a consensus about what we define as healthy, traditional Mediterranean diet. In 1995, a group of scientists, from Harvard University, created the “Mediterranean Diet Pyramid”. In 2010, UNESCO included the Mediterranean Diet in the list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, following a joint petition by Greece, Spain Italy and Morocco. Each country appointed a city or town as a representative of traditional crops, local customs and habits, cultural and gastronomical events. Greece appointed the town of Koroni, in Peloponnesus, Spain the city of Soria, Italy the town of Cilento and Morocco the town of Chefchaouen, as emblematic communities for the promotion of the Mediterranean diet.



*Mediterranean Diet Pyramid copyright © 1994 Oldways Preservation & Exchange Trust*

Greeks have always maintained a deep and primary relationship with the Goat. As it was mentioned above, in Greece the Goat symbolized wealth and plentiful food, as in the *Amalthea horn*, the “horn of plenty”. Indeed, in Greece the vast majority of the 7.800.000 sheep and goats are free range and no animal feed is needed; as a consequence sheep and goat meat is of unique quality, without any kind of additives and, of course, very tasteful. More particularly, goat meat is in great demand as it is less fatty than lamb meat and has its distinctive place in the Mediterranean Diet Pyramid.

## ***Recipe 1***

### **Easter lamb on a spit (souvla)**



One could say that Easter lamb is one of the most popular culinary delights in Greece. The lamb is usually slaughtered one day before it is cooked, namely on Holy Saturday morning; the offal is kept for preparing the *magiritsa* soup or the *kokoretsi*. The lamb is thoroughly washed with water and it is hung shrouded with a sheet to avoid contact with insects or flies and to let it dry. Ideally, the lamb should be between 12 and 10 kilos; the lamb has a lot of fat and it will lose a substantial part of its weight, so if it is too lean it will dry out and if it is too big it will not cook well. The following day, on Easter Sunday, the preparation starts early in the morning.

#### **Hardware for spit roast:**

Spit (*souvla*)

Wire and cutter to tie the lamb on the *souvla* frame

String and thick needle to stitch up the lamb

#### **Ingredients for the lamb:**

1 cup olive oil

1 cup lemon juice

1 cup salt and pepper (coarse sea salt) with oregano

Mount the fork into the shoulders and then tie the front legs into the frame. Force the U bolt into the middle of the back and then tie it off with the wing nuts. Mount the rear legs onto the frame. As soon as it is tied on the spit rub inside out with olive oil, lemon juice, oregano, salt and pepper. Get ready to stitch the lamb's belly up with thick string and needle. The lamb is ready to spit roast.

Dig a pit in the ground or use an open air grill. Light the fire and feed in the coals (approximately 10-15 kilos); one can also use dry twigs, even pines to feed the fire. The spit is mounted with an electric motor that turns it continuously (at different speeds). As soon as the coals are ready place the spit over the pit and the cooking process starts. The coals are mainly placed at the two ends of the spit where the meaty

parts are, the heat generated from the ends is enough to cook the lean parts in the middle. A lamb of 10 kilos will need 4-5 hours to cook. At the start, the spit has to turn quickly to avoid charring the flesh. Then it slows down to cook thoroughly the meat. The lamb is cooked when it starts making slits in the thighs and the back; then the meat starts coming off the bones. A well cooked lamb needs no hacking into pieces; as soon as it is taken from the spit and spread on the wax paper the meat comes easily off the bones, ready to be served.

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## KEY WORDS

Easter lamb, spit

## *Recipe 2*

### **Kokoretsi on the spit**



Kokoretsi is a traditional Greek delicacy consisting mainly of suckling [lamb](#) or kid [goat intestines](#), wrapping seasoned [offal](#), including [sweetbreads](#), [hearts](#), [lungs](#) and/or [kidneys](#). It was mainly a traditional Easter dish, usually consumed while the lamb was roasting on the spit, but nowadays it is available all year round.

Eating offal on the charcoal is a very ancient custom, mentioned in the Homeric epic poems. Indeed, in the *Odyssey*, Homer, alluding to events that took place around 1180BC, gives descriptions of banquets where guests feasted upon grilled meat and offal, in the context of the rural society of that time. It is also mentioned that it was a custom to consume grilled offal before tasting the main meat course, presumably to allow time for the lamb to roast on the spit, keeping up the festive spirit of the banquet.

The traditional technique for preparing and cooking the *kokoretsi* is the following: First the preparation starts with washing the intestines very carefully, so that each intestine is well cleansed without being torn in the process. For this purpose, the most common technique applied is flipping the intestine (inside out) using a stick (or pencil). Having washed the intestines with water they are placed in a bowl, in a mix of

lemon or vinegar, oregano and salt; they are left in the refrigerator for 2-3 hours, acquiring a white colour and an elastic texture; it is also a way to eliminate bacteria. Following the intestine washing one must wash carefully the offal. For an 80 cm *kokoretsi* one needs two intestines, two livers and two cawls (peritoneum). Some cooks add lungs, heart, spleen, kidneys and sweetbreads (throat glands in suckling lambs that disappear after weaning). Once the offal is washed, they are strained and cut into medium size pieces, seasoned with salt, pepper and oregano. The offal pieces are skewered in the following way: alternating liver, lung, sweetbreads, liver, etc. The cook tries to press tightly the offal and when the spit is full he ties the cawls around them. Then he ties a knot on the edge of the skewer and starts wrapping the first intestine round the offal pieces; when the first intestine has been wrapped, he pins the edge with a toothpick. On this toothpick he ties the second intestine and so on and so forth. Using this technique the whole *kokoretsi* is covered evenly with intestines, hiding the offal pieces. An important detail of this technique has to do with the measure of tightening the offal: it has to be tight enough but not too tight, otherwise there is a risk of breaking and bursting. The *kokoretsi* is grilled over hot coals, in sufficient distance from the fire, the spit must turn slowly. Cooking time is approximately 1 ½ hour.

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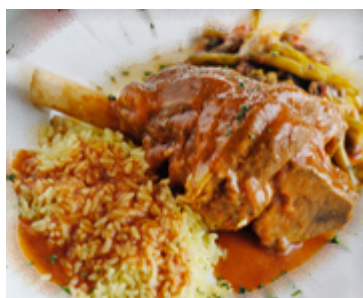
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#### KEY WORDS

Kokoretsi, spit, offal

### *Recipe 3*

#### **Lamb kapama**



“Kapama” derives from the Turkish word “kapak”, meaning cover and it involves food that is cooked *covered*, namely in a clay pan with a lid, inside a traditional wood fire oven. The pan is sealed with dough so that it is air tight, allowing no evaporation. It is a common way of cooking in the Balkan cuisine as we can find various recipes of “kapama”, for instance also in the Bulgarian cuisine, usually accompanied with vegetables. In Turkey they accompany it with lettuce, as in the fricassee recipe. While more often than not it is not accompanied by a tomato sauce, in some parts of Greece



they add tomato. There are various kinds of meat “kapama”, such as lamb, veal, pork and chicken.

This is a recipe for lamb ‘kapama’ from Peloponnese; in the village of Karies, in Laconia, they usually serve this dish in weddings, with tomato sauce and pasta.

**Ingredients:**

1 kilo lamb  
2-3- tsp. butter (preferably goat butter)  
1 glass white wine  
Tomato paste  
Salt, pepper, cinnamon, 1-2 cloves  
flour

**Directions:**

Cut the lamb in rather big pieces, season with salt and pepper, coat with flour and fry lightly in the frying pan with butter till golden. Transfer to pan. In the frying pan melt some butter with flour and stir vigorously till deep brown. Reduce with white wine and a little water, bring to boil and pour to the pan. Add salt and pepper to taste, cinnamon, cloves and the tomato paste. Leave to simmer in the covered pan till soft. When ready serve in a platter with the thick sauce on top and the pasta.

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**KEY WORDS**

Lamb kapama

***Recipe 4***

**Stuffed lamb in clay pan (mououri)**



On the island of the Aegean Easter lamb or goat kid is stuffed with offal, spices, aromatic herbs and rice. It is baked in the oven for many hours. The stuffing varies from one place to the other, the end result being always delicious. In Kalymnos, the lamb is roasted upright in a tall oven inside a clay pot, called *mououri*, sealed with mud. It is the local custom to throw mud to whoever happens to be passing by for good luck.

**Ingredients:**

A whole lamb  
Lemon (for rubbing inside out)  
Salt, pepper, oregano (for the stuffing and the lamb)  
String and needle (for tying and sewing)  
Dough (for sealing the clay pot)

**For the stuffing:**

1 lamb liver  
1 kilo veal minced meat  
1 kilo chopped tomatoes  
2 small onions finely chopped  
½ kilo rice  
1 glass of red wine  
½ - 1 kilo feta cheese and ¼ kilo grated *kefalotyri* (hard yellow cheese)

**Recipient:**

A tall clay pot to fit in the lamb with a lid or a tin box, 1m x 0.50cm with a lid, or a baking dish with a lid

**Directions:**

Sauté the minced meat with onions and chopped liver. Reduce with red wine and pour in tomatoes, spices, salt and pepper and the rest of the ingredients. Add rice with suitable amount of water.

Wash well and dry the lamb. Rub with lemon, salt, pepper and oregano inside out. Place stuffing inside the lamb's cavity, tie and sew with string and needle, then put inside the baking dish or clay pot; seal with dough. Bake in low heat, 100- 120 C. for about 24 hours.

Note: This cooking method was established during the Ottoman occupation, when invasions by pirates and Turks were a frequent phenomenon. The Greek population of the islands managed to prepare Easter lamb without any tell tale smoke or odour coming out of this cleverly designed cooking recipient.

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## KEY WORDS

Mououri, stuffed lamb, clay pan

## Recipe 5

### Lamb with wedding rice (gamopilafo) and staka



In Crete meat eating was integrated in rituals, as Ancient Cretans consumed meat only when they sacrificed to the gods. In modern times it was served only during religious celebrations, family feasts and Sunday family gatherings. A special occasion to serve rice was when the family celebrated engagements, weddings or baptisms, the famous gamopilafo.

The Cretan *gamopilafo* is a kind of risotto, namely rice cooked in broth to a creamy consistency. The broth is goat with / or poultry (preferably rooster). Gastronomers believe that it is a variation of the original Venetian recipe for risotto that came down the generations to be adapted by the Cretans to their own particular culinary tradition. Originally it was served only in weddings, as it symbolized fertility and wealth (rice is a fertility symbol that is why they throw it to the newly weds). For the same reasons they boiled in a big cauldron goat meat or/ and rooster. The goat was also an ancient symbol of fertility, stability and happiness, while the rooster also symbolized the dawning of happiness, of new beginning. Gradually the wedding rice became a popular traditional dish served throughout the year. In older times, the gamopilafo was made with a mix of different meats, namely poultry, goat or lamb, as it was the custom for the wedding guests to bring along their contribution for the celebratory feast. They would boil the meat and the rice would be cooked in the broth.

#### Ingredients:

- 2 kilos ewe /zygouri<sup>vi</sup> /goat
- 1 rooster cut into two
- 1 kilo rice (not parboiled)

2 tsp of *staka* butter<sup>viii</sup>  
Lemon, salt and pepper

**Directions:**

Wash all meat cuts thoroughly (goat and rooster) and put in cold water. Bring to boil. As soon as they start boiling skim the froth and leave to simmer for 1 ½ hour with a little salt. When cooked place in a platter. Strain the broth through a cloth sieve (*touloupani*) and if it is too fat dilute with some water. Add rice and season with salt. Bring to boil over high heat. Once it starts to boil reduce heat and cover. In 15 minutes uncover and the *gamopilafo* is ready. Use three cups of broth for every cup of rice. When the rice is cooked pour in the *staka* butter, after heating it in a saucepan (optional). Serve rice with meat on the side, or stir meat pieces in rice. Serve with lemon and freshly ground pepper.

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**KEY WORDS**

lamb, gamopilafo, staka butter, staka

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<sup>i</sup> In Greece -and all over the Balkan peninsula- the Ottoman sultans had to deal with the problem of subjugating the mountain population - increased by the fleeing inhabitants of plains - who not only were unwilling to compromise with the conquerors but also constantly rebelled against them. These were the ‘*Kleftes*’, the outlaws. The other category, the ‘*Armatoli*’, traditionally were also mountain people but had compromised with the rulers and were given the task of maintaining order as a local guard at the service of the Ottoman Empire. They occasionally managed to arrest some ‘*Kleftes*’, but they were not very diligent in exercising their duties. They never forgot their old comrades in arms and it was quite often that an ‘*Armatolos*’ would become a ‘*Kleftis*’ and live as an outlaw on the mountains. Through the years, the two denominations became almost synonymous and when the Greek Revolution broke out they were the first to enlist to the armed struggle.

<sup>ii</sup> A combination of seasonal dwelling and barn, where milk production would take place in situ.

<sup>ii</sup> In early 16<sup>th</sup> century, in Persia, there was a trend for introducing rice in a lot of dishes; the *pilāw* (pilaf) was first cooked in the Safavid dynasty’s palace. This culinary fashion influenced the neighbouring Ottoman cuisine strongly.

<sup>ii</sup> Food cooked in earthenware (clay) pots is probably an Arabian cuisine influence on the Ottoman one. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century there are a lot of imperial Ottoman recipes referring to lamb being cooked with rice, spices and nuts in deep, round, fired clay or earthenware casserole pots with lid.

<sup>ii</sup> Kourbani is the sacrificed animal but also the sacrificial act itself.

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<sup>ii</sup> The ewe and the ram (male sheep) are animals older than one year and weigh over 20 kilos. The zygouri is one year old and has not given birth to lambs yet; it weighs over 15 kilos.

<sup>ii</sup> Cretan butter from sheep/ goat milk

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